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ABSTRACT

Stressed is the use of art for developing creativity, perceptual skills, and cognitive skills in handicapped children. Art activities are suggested for the following handicapping conditions: visually handicapped, auditorily handicapped, cerebral palsy, emotionally disturbed, learning disabled, and mentally retarded. Described are sample art projects in printing and weaving. (SBH)

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Learning In A Friendly Environment:

Art As An Instructor

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Recently legislation (Public Law 94-142) has been initiated to establish full educational opportunities for all handicapped children. This includes art education. However, while art is recognized as a vehicle for the development of a child's imagination and self-expression, it is often not accorded adequate recognition for its cognitive, social, affective and motor learning potential (Burns, 1975). Art has the ability to reach children and teach them in a way no instructor can. Through the use of art projects one can create an uncritical, accepting environment in which to learn. This in itself is a new experience for many children. The materials used connote fun - they are not the standard learning materials which a child may associate with failure. An added benefit of learning through art is the fact that the child will have tangible evidence of his endeavors; proof of his accomplishments.

Through art the child learns via a M. Montessori approach of self-discovery. The child sets the learning pace and manipulates his own educational environment. Learning by doing breeds creative thinking, self-expression and the confidence to experiment, control and perfect skills. The thrill and wonder of discovery can be the starting point for self-propelled information gathering, leading to

all the other disciplines and preparing a receptive and logical foundation for learning. By encouraging self-discovery, originality and individualism, the competitive atmosphere is avoided and each participant is free to proceed at his own pace (Wiseman, 1973).

Art is capable of satisfying many of the emotional needs in children and of teaching the educational concepts which form the foundation of basic learning theories. Creative activity can be used for developing manual dexterity and patterns of movement and rythm. Social communicability is enhanced and self-confidence can be restored. Art helps the child to master his environment through the control of tools and materials while stimulating the skills of observation and discrimination. Foremost, art challenges the child's imagination and decision making processes. It puts him in touch with his surroundings (Lindsay, 1972).

There are several basic accomplishments which can be fostered through guided experiences in art:

1. Creativity: Children learn about themselves and their ability to create. When the child's creative labors generate a positive response from an adult, the child sees himself as one who has worth. He can do something and of his own making.

2. Perceptual skills: Perceptual skills such as form constancy, shape and size discrimination, and distance are funda-

mental to reading, writing and arithmetic.

3. Visual discrimination: The child learns about size, shape and color in a variety of art media and does so in an enjoyable way.

4. Perceptions of sameness or differentness: Differentiations among the many gradations of a single color which serves to refine visual skill while acting as an important antecedent to reading; repetitions of an object in the process of printing and the changes which occur are very subtle variations which serve to enhance visual skills. (Burns, 1975)

Cognitively, the child is capable through the art process of discovering many concepts for himself:

1. Properties of a medium: Paper for example; one may cut it, tear it, fold it, paint it, wet it, etc. As the student works with the medium, he must make decisions about it (do I cut it, tear it, fold it, etc.).

2. Organization: The child must organize his thoughts as to how to deal with the medium he is using (which color to use first or do I cut it first).

3. Composition: The child must organize several elements of an idea to plan his picture, collage or project.

4. Manual dexterity: Handling paint brushes, crayons or chalk of varying lengths and widths generates a tactile and kinesthetic perception of size while contributing to the development of writing skills through the refinement of small muscle skills. (Burns, 1975)

Communication is another area where the child is able to benefit from art activities. Making pictures or representations of his environment is one way in which a deaf child can describe his world. It fulfills a need in him to share his thoughts and ideas. This is true in a different sense for the child with emotional or behavioral disorders who has a difficult time verbalizing his desires or sharing his experiences with others. Art forms expand a person's power of expression in both verbal and non-verbal idioms. Subsequently, if the learning environment is accepting and free, the child will verbalize as he works to explain and comment on his art production. Ahern (1961) stated, "The handicapped child needs even more than normal children to find some area where he is recognized as an individual with his own unique forms of expression" (p.9). Art gives the child an avenue to build his confidence and to express himself both verbally and non-verbally.

In the past decade many theories of education have been advanced. The similar thread that ran through all these theories was the fact that the child is an individual with distinct learning strengths and weaknesses; call it prescriptive teaching or the individualized approach. Art is the original innovator in this regard. In art education the student controls the learning medium. His instruction is by definition individualized to his needs and environmental conditions. Art, unlike many teaching mediums, can be tailored to fit a variety of environmental situations and handicapping conditions.

Visually Handicapped

Necessarily, the visually handicapped child is extremely limited regarding his ability to participate in the visual arts. But the creative arts are not restricted to merely visual experiences and indeed, consist of equally valuable experiences in auditory and tactile sensations (Burgart, 1959). Extreme isolation and lack of normal play situations in most cases result in misconceptions of word-object symbols. Art stimulates and enhances the perceptual abilities of the visually handicapped child and helps to rectify these deficiencies. Clay modelling and folded paper designs offer a first step in developing concreteness of ideas (Jones, 1961). Sculpting in wood, wire and fibers;

printmaking; modelling with paper maché, clay or plaster, and the different variations offered by weaving are several of the creative outlets open to the visually handicapped student.

Auditorily Handicapped

The language of art offers the deaf child a means of communicating ideas which he cannot express in other ways. Their picture stories have an important place in the development of their spoken vocabulary (Bilger, 1961). "It is frequently stated that a deaf child lacks imagination and the ability to do abstract thinking. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he lacks opportunities to use his imagination. The child who is deficient in language is restricted in the ability to enjoy imaginary play such as that of a child with normal hearing .... If a child who cannot talk about an imaginary experience were to paint it .... he would be engaging in imaginary play and might also be enabled to share, sustain, and extend it" (Harrington and Silver, 1968, p.477).

A very important area in which art activities may aid the student who is auditorily handicapped is in gaining a sense of rythm. Deaf children will generally have a poorly developed sense of rythm because their sensory experience lacks the recurring

cadence of sounds. An emphasis on rythm experience through repetitive activities such as printing could help them to develop better motoric coordination and speech patterns (Lindsay, 1972).

Arts and crafts projects are an area in which deaf students are able to perform on an equal footing with their peers. This will do much to foster their sense of worth as an individual and help overcome the emotional trauma of being handicapped.

Cerebral Palsy

The needs of children classified as cerebral palsied will vary greatly according to the movements they possess and any compounding sensory handicaps. Art projects may be as simple as printing with a page turner worn on one operable finger or as complex as a string sculpture. What is important is the fact that the cerebral palsied child, no matter what his level of involvement, is able to participate in an activity in which normal children also participate. Art activities give this child the ability "to do something normal - to feel one with normal people on some level" (Scheerer, 1962, p.16).

Emotionally Disturbed

The purpose of art education for emotionally disturbed students is to help them gain self-confidence through their own achievements. Art is learning in an uncritical environment. Given the freedom to express himself, the child is likely to experience an emotional release which will leave him free to direct his learning potential. The physical exertion required in modelling clay, for example, can be used to give vent to many pent-up tensions and frustrations.

Another important aspect of the art class is having the student gain satisfaction from being a class member - part of a group. Mural making projects are excellent in this regard as they require group decisions such as theme and medium with the labor being provided by the individual. Hence, the child derives satisfaction from the group experience along with the pride which comes from individual achievement.

Learning Disabled

The handicapping conditions presented by the learning disabled child will vary greatly according to the child and sometimes even his environment. These children can present a variety of behavior ranging from hyperactive to hypoactive and from sensorily

perceptive to perceptually impaired. Art activities can help these children master reading, writing and arithmetic skills in an environment free of frustration and past associations of failure. Art connotes fun; so these children relax and enjoy their education. As the student creates a project, his self-esteem is enhanced and with his newly found self-confidence he is able to handle more traditional modes of learning.

Mentally Retarded

Art projects serve two purposes in the education of the mentally retarded child. First, the medium of art is motivating. The mentally retarded child is relatively difficult to motivate in teaching situations. However, when a "fun" project is introduced, he finds unbounded energies to engage in this pursuit. He does not look upon this endeavor as a learning situation but as a relaxed and uncritical situation. The child is thus freed from his prejudices and able to assimilate the learning possible in this situation (Semmel, 1961).

Secondly, art enhances the child's sense of security (Wiggin, 1964). The achievement he gains in art class carries into the retarded child's other activities. He feels he has gained accomplishments in one area and thus acquires a desire to achieve in other areas. He has found a particular joy that up to now was

rare in his life (Steinhauser, 1970).

One thing to guard against is the fact that because of the mentally retarded child's limitations, some teachers become exasperated and center all teaching with this child around tracing and copying. "But these methods only increase the child's dependency and lack of confidence in his own work which tends to create more problems for the teacher and child. Art must be a meaningful personal expression for this child - not busy work. Then any success, even though it will be small, will build his ego tremendously" (Emlen, 1970).

Art activities abound with educational opportunities for handicapped children. However, in order for these children to derive these benefits, teachers must appreciate what art media can do. The classroom teacher has to believe that through paint and clay the student can perfect those skills needed in acquiring the basics of education. The teacher's classroom can be transformed from a strict educational environment to an environment which is enjoyable and gives the student the emotional freedom to learn. For creative activity is actually individualized instruction, tailored to each child's abilities and meeting each child's needs.

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A Sample of Art Projects

There are many books written such as Lindsay's Art and the Handicapped Child and Schmidt's Craft Projects for Slow Learners where the reader may find ideas for art projects. However, rarely is it explained what theory or learning fundamental a certain art activity will help to teach. Hence, in an attempt to remedy that condition and give the teacher an idea of what can be taught through art media, the following examples have been compiled. The areas covered are representative of what could be available in a school system or home: printing, painting and weaving. The materials are inexpensive and readily available. The learning theories which can be taught using these media are unbounded. Moreover, art projects are self-motivational. Children enjoy manipulating the materials and the self-discovery inherent in the learning process. The freedom to create is enjoyed by all children and should be encouraged by all teachers.

Printing (or Print making)

Printing is an excellent activity for enhancing rythm experiences. A physically handicapped child will often lack those rythmic exercises learned in activities such as skipping or bouncing balls. A deaf child's experience is talking in the rythm that is usually built up in the cadence of sounds. The learning disabled

child and the mentally retarded child need this experience of rythm both for physical coordination and for the skills of writing and reading. Similarly, this rythm training will benefit the blind child learning to read Braille and give him confidence in handling tools and properties which he can feel but not see. All children will benefit from the self-confidence that comes with the expression of one's ideas and the decision-making process which is inherent in all creative work.

A simple project geared for the child with limited movement or coordination is printing with a rubber leaf turner. As basic as it appears to be, the fundamentals of printing are inherent in this project. Rythm can be established and maintained without the hinderance of extraneous variables. Place a rubber leaf turner on whichever finger is favored by the child. He can then press his finger on an inking pad and proceed to print on a piece of newsprint. The variations of this simple exercise are manifold. The child can print paper towels to be used as guest towels or place mats; or print material to be used as a table runner, draperies or scarves. Ink colors could be varied and the number of fingers wearing leaf turners could be increased. In addition, one could glue small cardboard shapes, nuts, rice, etc. to the turner and print a multitude of patterns.

This exercise is excellent for building the coordination of cerebral palsied children without requiring untold amounts of frustration. Severely retarded students should be able to manage this task and derive benefits from the patterns of movement involved. The rythm established by the repetitiveness of the finger's pressure printing will aid the deaf child with speech patterns and the basics of coordination. Most children should derive pleasure from the avenues available for experimentation via color selection and the process of glueing objects on the leaf turner. This task, by its very simplistic nature, will not intimidate the children. It is not an awesome appearing project - but rather one that looks conquerable. This is what makes it suitable for the emotionally disturbed child and why it is successful for most handicapped children. For if the task cannot invite the child to participate freely, then it will fail in its endeavor to teach or help the child.

Painting

Paint is an intriguing medium for children. The possibilities for experimentation are limitless; there are many vehicles for applying paint and many surfaces on which to apply it. Probably the most fascinating aspect of paint, however, is the fact that paint is colored - and the range of hues is limited only by the child's imagination.

Painting, in its versatility, can be adapted to any handicapping condition including painting with sand for the visually handicapped child. Experimenting with color combinations will attract most children. The joy of self-discovery is appreciated by every child and rarely is anything as fun as mixing colored liquids to see what happens. Piaget's theories of conservation and ideas of liquid measurement will become reinforced through this free experimentation. The physical coordination involved in pouring and mixing will benefit the students greatly.

Two projects concerned with the application of paint are the squeeze bottle method and blowing paint through a straw. For the child with limited coordination the act of applying paint may become a frustrating and unrewarding task. To make this more appealing, while simultaneously building movement patterns, fill a squeeze bottle (dishwashing liquid) with paint and dribble or squeeze to control paint flow over paper. An alternative to this would be to fill a spray bottle (window cleaner) with paint and spray the paper. This technique can be mastered in some form by most children. For those children, however, who have severe manual dexterity problems, straw blowing is an excellent project. This can be done in two manners. The simpler method is to place a small puddle of paint on the paper and have the child blow through a straw to dispense the paint. The more complicated method and

one which involves a certain degree of breath control, is to have a small dish of paint; the child inhales the paint partially up the straw then exhales to spread the paint. Colors, of course, can be varied and mixed on the paper for interesting effects. The joy of these methods of painting lies in its freedom from the standard tools of painting. Brushes can be limiting creatively, difficult to control motorically, and inhibiting emotionally.

Weaving

The art of weaving can be readily mastered by most children and offers great rewards. Weaving can be as basic as weaving paper strips or as complex as operating a floor loom. Many skills necessary for successful mastery of reading and arithmetic are inherent in the process of weaving; left to right and right to left discrimination, the concept of odd-even and over-under, set theory, ideas of "less than" and "greater than", as well as the basic experience of rythm. The art of weaving can instill a sense of appreciation for other cultures and their means of livelihood while also giving the child an understanding of the qualities of fabric. The basics of color: how one color combines with another, what hues go well together; in addition to an appreciation of varied textures are other aspects of the weaving experience. This is a craft that is at once artistic and

utilitarian where one can actually create a useful object, be it yardage or a wall hanging. Weaving is inexpensive and is a craft that can grow with a child as he matures.

Weaving is a skill that takes a certain amount of manual dexterity to master. One of the easiest projects with which to begin is the OJOS DE DIOS (Eyes Of God). This project is excellent because the child builds his own loom and then creates his weaving pattern on it. Hence, he follows the task from beginning to end and gains the satisfaction which comes from being self-reliant. Have the child find two fairly straight sticks or use small diameter dowels. Tie the sticks together forming a cross. Then begin by wrapping the yarn once around a stick, lay it over the next stick, wrap around once, and continue in this manner. A diamond shape will appear. To change color, tie new yarn color onto previous one and proceed wrapping. The child will be able to hold the loom comfortably and by turning the loom one-quarter turn after each wrapping the coordination process is eased. Both hands must be employed so this is an excellent exercise for those cerebral palsied children who favor one side, this project forces a coordination between both hands in an enjoyable manner. The blind child is able to work with this loom easily as all parts of the project can be contained in the child's lap or well defined

area. He does not become frustrated by the enormity of the project trying to keep track of various pieces. The learning disabled child will benefit from the task oriented nature of the project. This can easily be completed in one sitting so motivation is strong and attention span should be lasting. All children will find pleasure in working through the project from beginning to end and having tangible evidence of their endeavors.

Resource Books

For those of you who need a place to begin, these publications should provide that place. Three periodicals which should also be helpful are: School Arts, Arts and Activities, and Art Education.

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